

Extension to improve the welfare of traction animals

by

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Abstract

The position of animals in resource-poor societies is of necessity utilitarian and the welfare issue is not one of animal rights, but rather prevention of avoidable suffering. This paper suggests a systems approach similar to farming systems research and extension methods, for use by animal welfare agencies working in resource-poor areas. A situational analysis using rapid appraisal, cost-benefit analysis and ranking of welfare objectives should be carried out prior to intervention. This intervention should be participatory and proactive rather than reactive and prescriptive in nature. Animal welfare agencies in South Africa have shifted from a legislation-based approach to a more participatory approach. The paper describes a case history of a participatory project in the Soweto area of South Africa. Extension messages should be designed specifically for their target group based on situational analysis and should be evaluated after the project to determine their success or failure. People at different socio-economic levels have different concerns; extension messages relating to the concerns of the target group are most likely to be successful.

Introduction

In South Africa, animal traction has been largely ignored by agricultural researchers. Yet a survey performed during 1994 showed that cattle, donkeys, horses and, to a lesser extent, mules have an important role as traction animals in both rural and urban areas (Starkey, 1995). Historically animal power was important to all sections of South African society. As a result there is knowledge and legislation is available to maintain the well being of traction animals. This knowledge is only being transmitted to low-income and resource-poor traction animal owners by animal welfare agencies.

In the past the intervention of animal welfare agencies has been reactive and prescriptive. Animal owners have been arrested and prosecuted under the Animal Protection Act (1962), section 2,

offences in respect of animals. The following contraventions, mentioned in the Act, may lead to a fine of R2000 or imprisonment of up to 12 months for any person who:

“... cruelly overloads, overdrives, overrides, beats, kicks, goads, ill-treats, neglects [an animal].”

“... being the owner of any animal, deliberately or negligently keeps an animal in a dirty or parasitic condition...”

“... uses on or attaches to any animal any equipment, appliance or vehicle which causes or will cause injury to such an animal or which is loaded, used or attached in such a manner as will cause such an animal to be injured...”

“...drives or uses any animal which is so diseased, or so injured or in such a physical condition that it is unfit to be driven or to do any work...”.

The powers of inspectors from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) include arrest without warrant of offenders and confiscation of animals if there are reasonable grounds that the ends of justice would be defeated by delays in obtaining a warrant of arrest. Despite the powers granted to them, the attitude of animal welfare agencies in resource-poor communities has undergone a transition and more participatory methods are being considered. The importance of education in preventing cruelty has been realised but targeting and evaluating extension messages has been difficult.

The aim of this paper is to propose a more participatory and proactive stance for animal welfare agencies interested in promoting the wellbeing of traction animals.

The design of a participatory extension method

Any extension message must have a motivational aspect because the recipients of a message are more likely to listen to a message if it benefits them (McCrinkle, 1995). Socio-economic factors also have a strong influence on the distribution, dynamics and significance of animal well-being in South Africa (Krecek, Cornelius and McCrinkle, 1995). People at different socio-economic levels have different concerns and so will perceive the benefits of looking after their animals differently. Extension messages should be designed appropriately for the concerns of the target group. For example very poor people are likely to be worried only about physiological benefits to them so a message such as "Improve the feeding of your donkey and it will be able to carry water for your family" is likely to be effective. At higher socio-economic levels other benefits such as increased security, increased social standing and increased esteem become important so more appropriate messages could include "Improve the health of your draft oxen and they will be strong if your family needs them for plowing", "Look after your cows and you will be able to give milk to your neighbours" or "Improve your cart and you can win a prize at the show".

The rapid appraisal method has been used successfully for situational analysis of the status of animal traction in both rural and urban communities in South Africa (Starkey, 1995). It can also be used to investigate the welfare and well-being of traction animals. The team should preferably include a veterinarian and a sociologist or socio-anthropologist as the socio-economic status and cultural characteristics of the target community are important. In practice, we have found liaising with the local social worker is simpler (McCrinkle, 1995).

It is vital that the local community participates as partners in the process (Bembridge, 1991). To ensure this an animal welfare team visits a particular area and uses direct observation, key informants, semi-structured interviews, workshops and brainstorming, ranking, scoring and case-studies to gain knowledge rapidly and progressively with appropriate precision. Most important are listening skills - the team needs to listen to the needs and problems of the community

as well as observing animal welfare problems in the traction animals. After the appraisal the team meets to discuss appropriate interventions. These are analysed, with help from an economist, on a cost-benefit basis (McCrinkle, 1995) and an appropriate programme of intervention chosen.

Once a programme of intervention has been decided upon, an intervention team is mobilised and contacts are made with key persons in the community to finalise arrangements for the intervention. After the intervention the team meets again to discuss evaluation. This includes direct evaluation of the intervention as it takes place (making it more efficient) as well as long-term evaluation (rapid appraisal applied a few months or years afterwards to assess whether intervention had the desired results). The process is summarised in Figure 1, which is a systems approach adapted from farming systems research and evaluation methods.

Using this approach, animal welfare agencies may address the needs and perceptions of people in such a way that the wellbeing of animals is improved. This presupposes that the majority of animal abuse in low-income communities occurs through ignorance and neglect and there is no deliberate intent to inflict pain and suffering. In the case of animal abuse due to sadism, the approach would ideally involve punishment of the offender and prevention of further opportunities to abuse an animal.

Welfare objectives

An extension message has several components. The technical information must be up to date and accurate, it must meet the needs of the target community and it should be simple to understand (Bembridge 1991).

The following animal welfare objectives have been identified and extension messages formulated for promoting the wellbeing of traction animals in South Africa:

Improving the condition of animals

- correct feeding and watering
- teaching condition scoring
- bits which do not injure mouth
- shelter from elements

Improving the health of animals

- how to treat for external parasites

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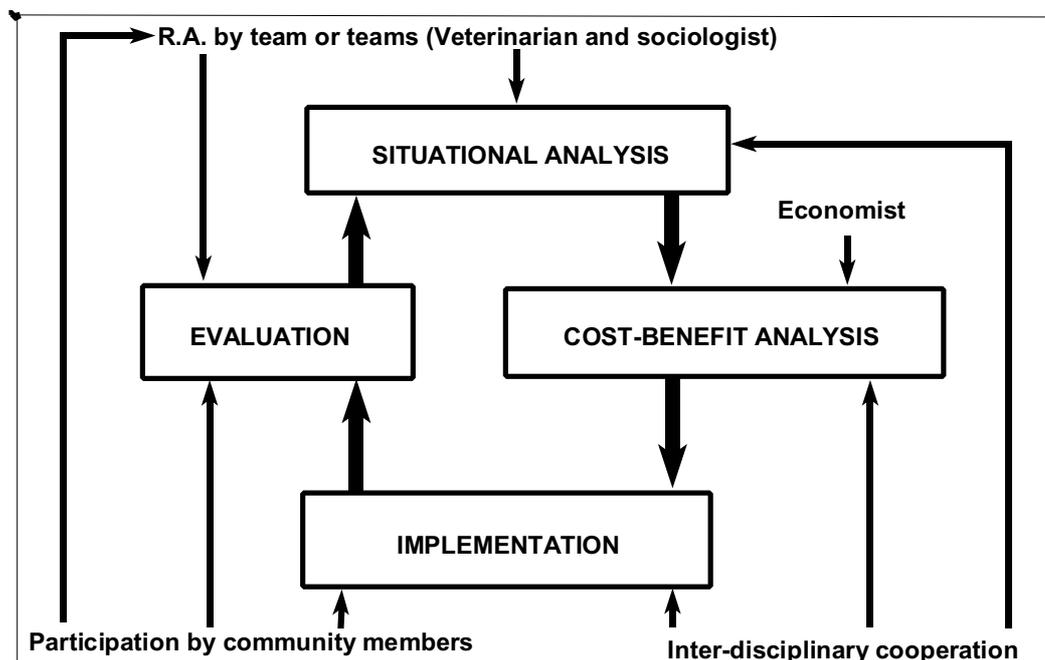


Figure 1: Diagram illustrating the systems approach used for selecting, ranking and evaluating animal welfare objectives (after McCrindle 1995)

how to treat for internal parasites
 recognition of disease
 who to talk to if an animal is sick

Preventing injury to animals

correct harnessing
 correct structure of carts
 correct loading of carts
 recognition of injuries
 treatment of minor injuries

Motivation to improve animal wellbeing

‘Bring your animal to our show and win a prize if it is the best.’

Much of the technical information required for developing extension messages about correct harnessing, cart structure and cart loading is available in the publication by Starkey, Mwenya and Stares (1994), among others. Technical information for extension messages about nutrition, condition scoring, recognition of diseases and treatment of minor injuries should be formulated with the assistance of a veterinarian who has experience of the target species of traction animal (for example it is counterproductive to ask

a companion animal practitioner about condition scoring oxen).

The method in practice

This method was successfully used in 1994 to initiate a companion-animal welfare outreach clinic to low-income urban areas near Pretoria (McCrindle, 1994). A similar method was used successfully by the Soweto Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in a settlement area known as Orange Farm, to improve the welfare of horses by exchanging new bits, donated by saddlery shops, for the rusty wire bits used previously.

A case study: Orange Farm, Soweto

The education department of Johannesburg SPCA launched an adult education programme for Soweto and Orange Farm in August 1994. This programme was extended in April 1995 to include the owners of working horses. Education officers meet these owners once a week at an established point where they bring the horses for shoeing, deworming, vaccination and treatment by the horse-care unit of the Soweto SPCA. Topics such as feeding, grooming, care of hooves, care of

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Table 1: Achievements of the Soweto SPCA programme, March–October 1995

<i>Operation</i>	<i>Number</i>
Shoes replaced	2,825
Number of horses shod	749
Harnesses repaired	61
Harnesses replaced	8
Bits replaced	50

equipment (bits, harnesses), carts, paddocking and basic health care are discussed and reinforced with appropriate literature available in Zulu, Sotho and Shangaan. Suitability of the breed of horse and care in relation to its ability to work well, are emphasised. Education officers suggest means of caring for horse and equipment which are within the parameters of the owner's means and circumstances for example:

wash and dry bit after use

clean harness after use and lubricate with old cooking oil to keep it soft - this eliminates cracking and breaking, therefore fixing the harness with wire is prevented as are harness galls caused by stiff, hard leather

keep horse in paddock free from broken glass, wire, tins etc - this prevents injuries which will keep the horse from working.

As a result of donations from two saddlery shops, old broken bits are exchanged for new ones. In most instances owners apply the knowledge they have gained from this programme and general improvement is seen. Statistics obtained from Soweto SPCA for the period March–October 1995

for Soweto, Orange Farm and the surrounding areas are shown in Table 1.

Conclusions

The position of animals in resource-poor societies is of necessity utilitarian and the welfare issue is not one of animal rights, but rather prevention of avoidable suffering. Proactive strategies with community participation are suggested. Extension messages selected should result in benefits which promote wellbeing for both animals and animal owners. By actively using, evaluating and modifying interventions using the suggested systems approach, it is felt that the welfare of traction animals in Africa could be considerably improved.

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